

**THE WHITE HOUSE**

**Office of the Press Secretary**

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**For Immediate Release**

**June 23, 1998**

**STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT  
Medicare and the Patients' Bill of Rights**

I am pleased to add my voice in support of today's efforts by Representatives Ganske and Dingell to file a discharge petition enabling an up or down vote in the House of Representatives for a patients' bill of rights. Since November of last year, I have been calling on Congress to pass such legislation.

It is now 7 months later and Congress has been unable to pass legislation, let alone hold even one Committee mark-up on a bill. With so many Americans' health at stake, I welcome the action taken today by Representatives Ganske and Dingell and I believe it will help ensure an open debate on this issue that will allow for all parties, including Representative Norwood, to bring patients' rights legislation to the floor for vote.

Passing patients' rights legislation would build on the actions I have already taken to extend patient protections to Americans in federal health plans. This Friday, we will publish a Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) regulation to implement new rules for all Medicare managed care plans. The HCFA regulation will implement the new Medicare plan choices I signed into law last year as a part of the bipartisan balanced budget agreement. It will also include many of the patient protections I directed Medicare to implement last February, when I signed an Executive Memorandum ordering all Federal health plans -- which serve 85 million Americans -- to come into compliance with the patients' bill of rights. These regulations ensure that Medicare beneficiaries in managed care plans have a range of important patient protections, including access to the specialists they need, access to ob-gyns, access to emergency room services and an independent appeals process to address grievances with their health plans.

Now we need the Congress to pass a Patients' Bill of Rights that guarantees all Americans these important patient protections. It is my hope and expectation that the bipartisan action being taken today in Congress will spur the House and the Senate to pass a strong, enforceable and long-overdue bill.